



Pretty Little Dead Things

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THOMAS USHER HAS A MOST TERRIBLE TALENT.

Following a car crash in which his wife and daughter are killed, he can see the recently departed, and it's not usually a pretty sight. When he is called to investigate the violent death of the daughter of a prominent local gangster, Usher's world is torn apart once more. For the barriers between this world and the next are not as immutable as once he believed.

Pretty Little Dead Things Details

Date : Published December 28th 2010 by Angry Robot (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9780857660701

Author : Gary McMahon

Format : Paperback 416 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Fantasy, Urban Fantasy, Paranormal, Ghosts

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From Reader Review Pretty Little Dead Things for online ebook

Nick Cato says

Thomas Usher is the survivor of a car accident that claimed the lives of his wife and daughter. Now it's fifteen years later, and since the accident he's been given the ability to see and receive subtle messages from the dead. In constant grief and attempting to understand his supernatural abilities, Thomas is called to investigate the disappearance of a gangster's daughter...and it leads him on a dark adventure through multiple realities (or "levels") that lead to one gut-wrenching, heart-breaking, intense finale.

McMahon's ghosts are half human/half spirit beings looking to make their way through the afterlife; Thomas Usher is known as an "Usher" as he guides certain souls on their path. In PRETTY LITTLE DEAD THINGS, he also comes face to face with a being that could be a spirit, or a demon, or one that has yet to be discovered, and it's a being whose unpredictability makes this novel nearly impossible to put down.

A strong cast (including Usher's tattooist go-to buddy and his law connection, Detective Inspector Tebbit) makes this novel shine, while a new, complicated relationship between Usher and his one-time mistress named Ellen adds even more depth to an already deep tale. One scene, dealing with a paranormal con-artist, is a highlight of Usher's investigation.

The entire tone of this novel managed to get under my skin; it's constantly dark with nearly every scene filled with dread and impending doom. McMahon's atmosphere is fantastic, thanks to his partially-poetic (and well-timed) prose. While there's a few scenes of well-placed (and graphic) violence, it doesn't distract from the dark fantasy feel (and in fact manages to increase it).

PRETTY LITTLE DEAD THINGS is one of those novels that you don't want to end. You want to follow Usher on his journey, and hopefully he'll be back to help guide more spirits on their way. This one's a keeper and easily one of my favorite horror novels of 2010.

Ken says

Pretty Little Dead Things is the debut novel from Angry Robot's Gary McMahon and the first in a series of books featuring Thomas Usher, a sort of sleuth who can communicate with the dead. Thomas Usher doesn't truly converse with the dead but rather he can sense their story and from this he is able to figure out their messages from the cryptic clues that they give him.

Thomas Usher is a tortured soul. He lost his wife and young daughter in a car crash and since waking up in the hospital, he finds himself able to sense and feel the dead around him. No matter how many ghosts he helps, he has never been able to find the ghosts of the two people he wants to see the most, his wife and daughter. For every ghost or person that he has failed, he tattoos their names to himself as a reminder of his guilt of letting them down.

In Pretty Little Dead Things, Usher begins with a simple job following the daughter of his employer. However things soon turn ugly and he finds himself caught in a complicated situation involving 3 dead girls who all have links back to his employer. At the same time, the niece of his once lover is missing and he fears there is a connection between these two cases.

This is a terrific thriller and horror story with descriptions of ghosts so vivid that makes you skin crawl. The scene where Kareena's ghost is hanging on Usher's landing is one of the best descriptions I've read of a ghost. McMahon also done a masterful job in portraying the loneliness that Usher feels for being stuck between two very different worlds while not belonging to either. Through these few hundred pages, I came to care about the protagonist, but just when things are finally going well for Usher, suddenly I see his hopes brutally dashed by a great evil.

Note: The following paragraph contains spoilers.

If I have to pick faults with this story, it would be the final part of this book. I feel that a coherent ending was sacrificed because too much emphasis was placed on introducing the big bad of the Thomas Usher series. I don't think there were enough said about the motivations for the Royales' to give up their daughter and why they made such a big scene if in the end they were the perpetrators? If the big bad had something to do with pushing them to do the things they did, it wasn't made very clear in the book.

On the whole I enjoyed McMahon's gritty style and his bleak depictions of Leeds and he did a great job of adding a supernatural element to a standard crime story. It is one of the better horror thriller books that I've read and I will make sure to follow this author.

(Reposted from <http://www.paperlessreading.com/2011/...>)

Scott says

It's another super-glum novel from Mr. McMahon. Fifteen years ago, Thomas Usher lost his wife and daughter in a car crash for which he feels partially responsible. Ever since then, he has been able to see ghosts, so he occasionally works as a kind of exorcist who helps the spirits move on to wherever they are supposed to go. At the beginning of this story, he's operating as a detective when the girl he's tailing is murdered.

This book started out fair, but irked me more and more as I progressed. Let's start with Usher. He has two defining characteristics: he's depressed and guilt-ridden. Yeah, he's a fun character. He is so guilt-ridden that he has the names of people he's "failed" *tattooed on his back*. I could see if he kept a notebook, or even had a list framed on his wall, but tattooing them on his body? Laying it on a bit thick.

The book spends less time on the murder mystery than it does telling us how miserable Usher is.

The finale is one of those where the author can't figure out how to resolve the story so he attempts to overwhelm the reader with weirdness, hoping he or she won't notice that it doesn't make any sense. And it doesn't resolve anything, because at the end Usher looks more guilty than he did before, but McMahon hand-waves it away by having him basically say "this is sure gonna be tough to explain to the chief!" Indeed. The end.

At the end of the book is a short that expands on an event referenced in the main story. It's not too bad, and at fifteen pages there isn't as much time for Usher to talk about how sad he is, but I'm not sure it would stand alone as a story.

If you are interested in this sub-genre, read Mike Carey instead. He's a far better writer and has a sense of

humor.

Matthew Fryer says

During the last year, I've enjoyed watching Gary McMahon rise from a champion of the small press to the big leagues, and his lastest mass market release perfectly demonstrates why this is so. This novel is a very tight combination of noir, horror and character drama.

In *Pretty Little Dead Things*, we meet Thomas Usher, a man who loses his wife and young child in a traffic accident, but develops a supernatural talent to keep him busy through the years of bitter grief. He can see the recently deceased, and they want to tell him things. As the story progresses, and he investigates the murder of a gangster's daughter and the kidnapping of a local child, it becomes clear that his gift is the only thing that keeps him trudging through life. He yearns for redemption, yet refuses to let go and punishes himself with tattoos to commemorate those he has failed.

As with all Gary's previous publications, the characters are strong right down to the cameos. I expected to become weary of Usher's grief-stricken self-flagellation, but the pathos is such that I discovered myself right in his corner, and the other characters – including an old romantic interest and a cancer-addled police colleague – also force your investment. And you won't forget the menacing figure of Mr. Shiloh and his plastic, soulless smile.

The author's attention to detail is as sharp as ever. He has a neat trick of allowing the subconscious to notice little things that you only fully acknowledge later on when they turn out to be important. Perhaps his prose is slightly less rich than before, but this isn't a complaint. Far from it: silent narration takes real writing skill.

This book has a very bleak atmosphere at times, and some segments are nightmarish in their lucidity. A scene involving some recently deceased corpses dangling from the protagonist's landing is an image so clear that I might as well have seen a photograph of it. This makes it very difficult to forget. And after Usher is menaced by faceless hoodies, walking through the city at night won't ever be quite the same.

There are creepy layers of reality throughout - some ghostly, others concrete - but even with the latter, everything seems slightly off-kilter and wrong: the essence of any quality piece of ghost/horror fiction.

It's a less "noisy" novel than *Hungry Hearts* - his 2010 zombie novel from Abaddon books - and feels more like old-school Gary McMahon. Here, he relies more on mood and atmosphere rather than action. But that's not to say *Pretty Little Dead Things* doesn't slam its foot on the accelerator when required. The first part of the book has a gentle, more literary flavour, but it has all pleasingly kicked off by the end.

As usual, I can do nothing but highly recommend this book. The follow-up *Dead Bad Things* is due later this year, and I'll be at the front of the queue, rubbing my hands like a hungry ghoul at the kicked-in doors of a city morgue.

Andrew says

Reading a series of books (however few there are since in this case there are only 2) out of order is never a good idea - sadly a lesson I seem to have not learnt yet as I have just finished the first book of Thomas Usher AFTER I had read Dead bad thing earlier in the year.

The story is still as gritty and gruesome as the first (okay second book but I read it first) but more importantly it explains a lot of what happened in Dead bad things and the familiarity of certain characters. Don't get me wrong I would sooner have a book which assumes a level of understanding rather than being made to wade through page after page of explanations which if you had been paying attention (and read the first book, okay last time I promise) would have explained it all to start with.

The book was slow for me to start with - which I think is partly my doing since sooner or later you have to have some explanations but also there was an element of growing - when you read the book you very quickly find out why and how much Thomas Usher is a broken man but still even with all that going on he has to find the strength to step up and that takes time. Okay I did say no more but reading the second book you can start to see the man rise to the challenge its still pretty daunting but you see a different man appear and that is what makes this series so interesting in my opinion. its not the same person just facing a new villain. it is more that as he helps others he is helping himself and for that I cannot wait to see if and when a new instalment to the series is released and where the story goes from there.

On a side note there was reference to an event that he was the soul survivor from, well at the end of the book is a short story that recounts this events. I am still in two minds if this was the right thing to do. Yes I was desperate to find out what happened but counter to that once a mystery has been explained it is no longer a mystery and sometimes that is better for not knowing.

Shaun says

This is the story of a man hired to find a killer by one [unsavoury] individual and discover the truth behind a missing girl's disappearance by another [sympathetic] individual. And yet it is so much more.

Usher is tortured. Since surviving the road accident that stole him of his wife and daughter, the makeshift Private Eye has been able to see ghosts; thumbprints of those whose spirits are tortured by their passing. Feeling a duty to the dead and bereaved, he takes it upon himself to ease their way towards their chosen celestial plane. Sometimes he succeeds, sometimes he doesn't, and for those whose souls are left wanting, he further tortures himself by marking his body with their names. The dead seeking his help include a pretty murder victim - supposedly left to hang by her boyfriend - and a child who has died under the most appalling circumstances. He sees them all and does whatever he is capable of to soothe their pain.

Despite his abilities, in the years since the car crash, Usher has been unable to find the two ghosts he longs to see more than any other. Until he does so he will never move on with his life; a point painfully highlighted by his confusion regarding his love for an old friend with whom he had a one night stand with whilst his wife was alive. Add to this mixture a higher being who watches and manipulates Usher to satisfy his own warped desires and you have a man finding it impossible to be the individual he wants to be.

Gary McMahon has managed to capture the tragedy and guilt Usher carries with him like a prize by remaining sympathetic towards a character whose faults are more desperate than most. The loneliness Usher both craves and despises is written in such poetic prose it is difficult to turn a page without feeling the threat of a tear spilling down your cheek. At times you will want to grab Usher by the collar and slap him till he

wakes up from his self-induced coma; other times you'll try to reach into the page and wrap a reassuring arm around his shoulders, telling him, 'it's all right'. When you discover the fate of characters you have grown to care about, you want to switch your shock and anger towards the author for allowing something so beastly to happen. When you witness the moment of Usher's meeting with the man responsible for his wife's death, you are at odds with yourself: part of you wants him to enact revenge, the other wants forgiveness. And when the truth will out, again you're looking at Gary's photograph in the back cover, shaking your head in wonder.

Is it perfect? No. Of course not. Very few novels are but it's certainly a swift read, difficult to put down, full of original touches and stuffed with memorable characters

Does it deserve great success. Without any shadow of a doubt.

Will it live up to its expectations? It's already blown them out of the water.

Will it help the horror brand which is unfairly ridiculed by so many? Along with Adam Nevill, Joseph D'Lacey, Conrad Williams and Bill Hussey (to name but a few), horror is in danger of becoming respectable!

Bring on book 2!

Taueret says

Ok, I must be weird- both this book and its sequel "Dead Bad Things" got good reviews from readers on Goodreads- but to me they sucked so bad.

This reads like Sarah Palin wrote it. Like she read a pile of Clive Barker and Stephen King and said 'okie dokey I can do that'- and sat down and penned this. I can see her now, in her "writing Barbie" outfit, tongue poked out in concentration as she pecks the keys one at a time. Her editor was way, way too scared of the crazy lady to dare to edit it at ALL. Even in places where the SAME ADJECTIVE WAS USED IN TWO CONSECUTIVE SENTENCES. Not in an artsy way, just in a suckhole way. Not even in places where a metaphor, once launched under full majestic sail, withered and died on the vine like a mutant horror monster from a horror movie. Not even in places where... Ok I will stop now.

The title of this book and its sequel are cool. There are some fun and creepy if unoriginal ideas in both books. But oh my giddy aunt. ONLY read this if you like reading prose so mangled that it actually distracts you from the story. I am keeping notes as I struggle through "Dead Bad Things" (what a great title! What a terrible book) and will share some of my favourite excerpts later.

Mark says

Thomas Usher can see ghosts and it's his job to try and find out their stories. Having lost his wife and child some years before, he's hardened to life and when the girl he's been hired to follow winds up dead, he digs a little too deeply and finds out things that would best be left undiscovered. A cool, dark, downbeat horror-thriller, this is the first of two Usher novels that McMahon will publish through Angry Robot books and it's a killer. From the painful, poignant relationship between Usher and his old friend Ellen, to the grime and sleaze he encounters along the way to the gripping, shattering conclusion, this is told with verve and wit and

a fearless desire to show the reader what lies just below the surface of modern Britain. Full of inventive, realistic characters, gruesome set pieces and a very nasty dark turn from The Pilgrim, this is a startling, demanding novel, that I recommend highly.

Ben Babcock says

I read *Pretty Little Dead Things* with shivers down my spine. It's that kind of book: Gary McMahon creates suspense and no small amount of dread as he introduces us to Thomas Usher, a sometime private investigator who sees dead people. Usher becomes mixed up in a series of grisly murders that all point to something much more sinister going down (yes, more sinister than murder). And he isn't the only one who is slinging supernatural power. A malevolent being from another dimension has discovered Usher's powers and is now playing a fatal game of cat and mouse.

Pretty Little Dead Things has an impressive, gritty atmosphere to it—but it also got me down. It's just not a very uplifting book. This guy's family dies in a car crash in the first chapter, and then we skip forward a few years and find him kind-of-functioning but still unable to move on. He's a loner who hangs out with low-life businessmen. The closest thing he has to a friend is a police detective who is dying from cancer and therefore not long for this world. Thomas Usher is not having a good time—and neither did I.

It's a clever little title, and this is a clever little book. But it never seems to go beyond clever. It's all surface and no depth beneath. McMahon tours us around Usher's life and shows us Usher's power—and that's it. Usher sees dead people. He can't *talk* to them per se, but they can communicate certain things to him in a kind of subliminal way. This should be a very cool power, but the way in which McMahon portrays it makes it the most mundane thing ever. So Usher uses the power to help solve crimes, but mostly all we see of it involves the flashbacks McMahon provides to help flesh out Usher's backstory.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm not happy with how *Pretty Little Dead Things* takes so long to get to the good stuff. Most of this book seems like filler—tasty, albeit depressing filler, but filler nonetheless. It doesn't get good until Usher figures out that the mystery is much bigger than anyone so far has supposed. And even once that happens, McMahon dashes any hope of redemption by writing an ending that, to me at least, was rather difficult to follow. I'm still not sure what happened (or why I should care).

And that's the bottom line: nothing really made me care about Thomas Usher or this book. It's written well enough, so if noir urban fantasy is your cup of tea, you might enjoy this. I couldn't work up the enthusiasm though.

Glen Krisch says

Solid effort. McMahon isn't afraid to go to weird places! Felt like it could have been edited down in length. Otherwise, I'm impressed with my first novel-length read by McMahon.

Sarah says

27/2 - Can this live up to the hype that I've heard going around about it? I haven't read or heard any praise, or criticism, just a lot of excited hype. According to Ramsey Campbell (who the hell is Ramsey Campbell), on the back of the book, Gary McMahon is "one of our darkest - which is to say brightest stars - stars in the firmament of horror fiction." We'll see...

Also this is my first ever buddy read (not counting being told to read up to chapter 'whatever' in the class book of the semester for English or Lit, I, of course being the avid reader I've always been, had already read the whole book in the preceding school holidays and was now re-reading along with the rest of the class, most of whom never read any of the set books anyway) with my good friend and hopefully, fellow horror enthusiast, All Hail Grimlock (aka Grim). To be continued...

Later that night - Hang on, page 14, Allyson is described as Thomas' 'infant daughter', but page 15 you're talking about refereeing a football (soccer) match for Ally's school team. Ally can't be both an infant and be at school. Which one is the correct description? Okay, page 17, Ally is now seven - hardly an infant.

Oh! One chapter a night is hard to stick to. I blasted through chapter one and was nearly finished the first page of chapter two before I remembered to stop. But it's okay, I'm a fast, many pages in one night kind of reader who is on holiday with even more reading time on her hands than usual. So I am happy (really, I am) to compromise and keep pace with my buddy who is reading along with me. Let me use a skiing analogy since I'm at a ski resort: people ski at different levels, people take lessons, there is usually more than one person in the lesson with you, no one (hopefully) expects their fellow students to be at the **exact** same level of ability and confidence as they are. Sometimes you're the faster, more experienced skier waiting at the bottom of the run for the other students as they make stiff, awkward turns down a slope you flew over, sometimes **you** are the skier who feels embarrassed for holding up the rest of the lesson because you got stuck on a tricky bit. Whoever I am in that analogy (skiing or reading) I am always happy to compromise because I never know where I'll be on the next slope. Five days/chapters from now Grim may have to wait for me as I'll be out of internet range while getting back home over 30+ hours or so of travelling. It's kind of like karma - I compromise now and am forgiven for forcing a slow down on the chapters later (not that Grim's likely to have a fit anyway, but I'll store up the compromise karma for another time when I do need it). To be continued...

28/2 - Page 26, sex pests? Are they England's answer to Melbourne's 'sex fiends' (who are anyone who commits any kind of sex crime on anyone)? In the context it was used in I think the less ambiguous 'rapist' would have worked better. To be continued...

2/3 - Is this really the first book in the series? GR says it is, but sometimes GR lies (dues to librarian error, or whatever). The reason I ask is because Thomas (our narrator) constantly refers back to events that happened after his wife and daughter died, but before the start of this book and it's really starting to irritate me. He talks as if we should know his 'middle' story (not 'back' story, but 'middle' story), even in the vaguest terms and we don't, not at all. Which is why I question if this really is the **beginning** of the series. If this does turn out to be the second book I'm going to be **really** annoyed. As anyone who's read my reviews on romance series will know I **HATE** reading a series out of order, especially (obviously) if details from the previous book impact on the current story (as they definitely do here). Oh, and an editing miss with: "**Not** matter how many times I saw stuff like this..." on page 36. To be continued...

18/3 - I really like the plot (supernatural themes are a favourite of mine), but GOD why does Thomas have to

be so damn depressing?! I loved the tv show Medium and that's kind of what I was expecting, with the tragic twist that his family was killed in an apparent car accident. It doesn't seem to matter what happens to Thomas his whole life is doom and gloom, perpetually waiting for his wife and daughter's ghosts to appear to him. It's almost as if he's waiting to see them before he can be at peace and die, and finally be with them again. The two mysteries that are running concurrently, mostly in the background, although one of them appeared to be the main plotline of the book, are interesting but very slow moving. It's been three, four, maybe five chapters since anything regarding the main mystery - a serial murder mystery - has been discussed. The book is full of words, but at the 200 page mark, not much has happened, mostly just a lot of description of the grim atmosphere surrounding Thomas. I want to know more about what evil supernatural entity is behind the murder of the three young women who were all connected through the making or distribution of porn; I want to know what has possessed the man who was driving the car that caused the fatal car crash; I want to know what has happened to Penny Royale and how she might be connected to the beings in the hoodies; if not for those three still-engaging mysteries I think I would be having doubts about whether to continue reading. The book makes England look like the bleakest place on the planet. Often reading a great book will make me want to visit the country it's set in, not so much with *Pretty Little Dead Things*. In fact, if I hadn't already visited England and found it to be completely ungrim, this book might put me off ever making the 22 hour trip. To be continued...

25/3 - Bleak, grey, depressing. All I can do is echo what I said in my last update. The subject matter is great (it's about the only thing keeping me going with *Pretty Little Dead Things*, it's certainly not Thomas' personality, the pacing or the likelihood of a good outcome for **anyone**), but the interpretation sucks. Why is Thomas not allowed something good, something bright and shiny in his world? And when he thinks he has that good thing it has to be ripped away from him in the most horrible way possible. If there are mediums (or whatever they want to be called) out there I pray that that they aren't living Thomas' life, that it's more like Alison Dubois' life, because I wouldn't wish Thomas' existence (you can't really call what's happening to him a life, can you?) on my worst enemy. To be continued...

P.S. - Evil house on chicken legs is not evil or scary, it reminds me of the flying contraption they built in Chicken Run, which ran around, comically banging into things.

26/3 - Finished (possibly a day or two early, sorry Grim). 3 to 3.5, mostly because I got tired of Thomas' depressing situation pretty quickly. The plot was promising, but I just couldn't get past how much I disliked the main character.

The ending was weird and confusing. (view spoiler)

I've heard there's going to be (or already is) a sequel. Will that pick up where this one left off (view spoiler) Maybe it'll just be another case. All I can say is I hope it's not as gloomy.

The little extra at the end, The Late Show, was the best part of the whole novel. It was scary (reminded me of a cross between House on Haunted Hill - scariest movie ever - and The Ring - Samarra's got to be one of the scariest characters ever), there was no gloom hanging over Thomas and it was a perfect length - telling of one incident in Thomas' death filled life. I think, maybe, novels aren't McMahon's thing, maybe he should go back to short stories, where he seems to have been excelling for some years now.

Helen says

Thomas Usher can see and commune with the dead, except those he wants to see most of all, that is the ghosts of his wife and child killed in a car crash some years before.

He uses his abilities to pay his way in life, and, as a result, comes into contact with some decidedly dodgy characters, which is how he comes to be investigating the death of the daughter of a local 'businessman'. I really enjoyed this clash of the realms of the dead with the realism of a gritty northern setting and found the Mr Shiloh character to be very creepy and unnerving.
Recommended read for horror lovers.

Janette Fleming says

Thomas Usher sees dead people – the bigger problem is that worse things can see him...

Thomas Usher is a tortured soul, weighed down with guilt after the death of his wife and child following a car accident which left them dead and him with the ability to see dead people.

I wanted to read his book because I was curious to find out how Thomas Usher compared to John Connolly's Charlie Parker with similar circumstances.

There are strong similarities in the characters and their situations but that is where it ends. The geographical settings sum up the differences between the styles perfectly: Maine and Leeds.

Maine, steeped in folklore, with its everlasting winter, vast, mysterious woods, wild rugged coastline has a haunted, cruel poetic beauty. While Leeds... bleak, brutal, gritty and visceral. It's very grim oop North

The bleakness is relentless – the mantra is “Memento Mori” remember you will die but the writing is fabulous and almost slips into an angst-ridden prose at times. Thomas Usher is a compelling character so full of guilt he can hardly function, a truly broken man. Reminds me a little of early Clive Barker/Ramsey Campbell.

Jane Long says

Different, that's what I would call this book. Its started off promising, but then ghosts, spirits etc came into it! (Not that I am against any of that, but come on!) Some of it was interesting and believable, but a lot was too far fetched to make it a part of the story. The title drew me to this book. I should of took it literally!!!!!!!!!!!!

Colin Leslie says

ou will be seeing a lot more of Gary McMahon over the next few years. With a number of publishing deals already signed and no doubt more on the way he is fast becoming one of the most prolific writers around, thankfully he is also one of the most talented. Much of his previous work has been nominated for awards and has gathered widespread critical acclaim so his star is certainly in the ascendance. Now comes the possibility of that tough transition from successful genre writer to mass market bestseller can this book take him there?

Pretty Little Dead Things is the first in a proposed series of books featuring Thomas Usher. We first meet a happy and content Thomas before a tragic accident, which he blames himself for, sees his wife and daughter killed in a car crash. The scars of the accident leave Thomas, not only psychologically damaged but also with a strange psychic ability. He is able to see and receive messages from ghosts, lots of them and they all seem to be trying to tell him something.

After being hired by a local businessman to watch over his daughter, Thomas becomes embroiled in a murder investigation and the search for a missing child. So far, so psychic cop show you may think but what this short outline fails to deliver is the sheer dark intensity of Thomas's journey. McMahon's books are generally quite bleak but here he excels in creating a darkness which penetrates everything and everyone that Thomas comes into contact with, in the word of Nigel Tufnel there's "none more black".

Thomas' gift is a curse but he feels compelled to use it, if only out of remorse. So his world is a loveless, dark and dangerous place until he meets Mr Shiloh then things get a whole lot worse. The book moves into overdrive as we descend into a nightmare world inhabited by beings and scenes straight from a Hieronymus Bosch painting. This gives the book a real edge and is reminiscent of early Clive Barker, being powerful, compelling and deeply emotional.

It's not perfect, there are a couple of scenes where the dialogue seems a bit overblown, "...peoples expectations and the limitations of the authorities rarely correlate" doesn't sound like the kind of thing people usually say over dinner. Also amidst the powerful descriptive metaphors there can be a tendency to lapse into Merenghian "Blood; her blood. Penny's blood. They were all lathered in it. Blood. Blood. Blood" altogether now... "and bits of sick". Of course this may just be Gary McMahon winking at the horror community but there are odd occasions when the fine line between the sublime and the ridiculous is not quite crossed but definitely straddled.

These are minor criticisms, however, of what is a terrific book. It takes a standard crime plot and applies a fine horror mentality to raise it above the norm. It's the universal message portrayed in the recurring phrase "Memento Mori", remember you will die, that resonates so deeply. The scenes in the otherworld are horrifically bleak and will stay with you for a long time. Whether it has mass market appeal remains to be seen but genre fans should rejoice that Gary McMahon has not sold out or dumbed down. His writing remains powerful, bleak, shocking..oh and brilliant.
